

# Faith and Character

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Faith and character



**By Justin Schneider**

PENDLETON — “Know thyself.”

“I signed up for the PLUS program not knowing what I was getting myself involved in, except that

I wanted something different than what prison life had to offer. What I found was a group of men that wanted the same, a chance to change the way you live, think and understand that things can change.”

Randy Criswell, PLUS Graduate

Jasahn Larosa let Socrates sum up the spirit of the Purposeful Living Units Serve (PLUS) program in those two words.

Larosa was one of 101 offenders at the Correctional Industrial Complex (CIF) in Pendleton honored Wednesday as the first graduates of the PLUS program. Over 16 months, PLUS is designed to instill a sense of accountability and promote transformation in offenders.

“A lot of us were chasing superficial value systems,” Larosa said. “Compassion, honesty, tolerance, respect, responsibility, these are the forces that should drive your life.”

Officials from CIF and the Indiana Department of Correction addressed the offenders along with an audience of more than 100 friends, family members and staff. Larosa spoke for the offenders, quoting Shakespeare and Socrates, and urging his classmates to take responsibility.

“Emotional mismanagement may very well be the cause of all your lifetime problems,” Larosa said. “Anger and pain can be scary experiences. Loneliness, isolation. It’s natural to experience these feelings. But don’t let feelings control you.”

PLUS began as a pilot program at CIF last summer and is now being offered in 16 Indiana correctional facilities. It began as a cooperative effort between Indiana Rep. P. Eric Turner and Department of Correction Commissioner J. David Donahue.

During his comments, Donahue emphasized that graduation from PLUS is only the beginning of a long process.

“You have a choice every day, but it’s not going to be easy,” he said. “When you’re just getting out of jail, you might use it as a crutch. But, if you do, you will limp back into the Department of Correction.

“You are going to be viewed by what you do and how you do it. That’s a heavy burden to give you, but I’m giving it to you, anyway. It will depend on your desire and your internal fortitude.”

In order to graduate, offenders must complete a 16-month curriculum that includes classes such as Houses of Healing, Wellness Wholeness, Please Understand Me, The Path, Spiritual Literacy, Safe People, Portfolio Development and Developing a Winning Attitude.

CIF Superintendent Tom Hanlon said the facility was ideal for introducing a new program.

“Our size, our population, our staff and our volunteers all played a key role in the decision,” said Hanlon. “All those factors made this facility appropriate for a new pilot program.

Each candidate chooses a path of either “faith” or “character.” CIF Assistant Superintendent Tim Horan said the faith path employs a multi-religious approach with an emphasis on tolerance.

“PLUS internally changes the offender,” Horan said. “Just as his values and his character changes, PLUS gives them a program to address those changes.”

After Larosa’s comments, Stephen Hall, CIF PLUS coordinator Joe Huff and Chaplain Robert Schafer announced the name of each graduate and passed out certificates to each one.

Graduates will not leave CIF. Instead, their graduation certificate will be attached to their file, in case they come before a judge again. But the hope is that each offender completes his term and stays out of the criminal justice system.

“I signed up for the PLUS program not knowing what I was getting myself involved in, except that I wanted something different than what prison life had to offer,” said graduate Randy Criswell. “What I found was a group of men that wanted the same, a chance to change the way you live, think and understand that things can change.”

Donahue posed for pictures with graduates after the ceremony. Offenders, staff, family and friends gathered for a luncheon.

After 16 months of getting to know themselves, PLUS is helping offenders overcome their weaknesses.

“The PLUS program really helped me to forgive myself,” participant Anthony Carbonatto said.

## **About The Department of Correction**

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department’s home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department’s Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.

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